

# **Violence against Women in West Bengal-Bangladesh Borderland**

**Sanika Banerjee**

**M.Phil. scholar**

**Department of political science**

**Vidyasagar University**

**Email- sanikabanerjee1996@gmail.com**

## **Abstract:**

Borderlands are not just a land or a space created in the particular process of boundary demarcation. It is the land where the security of any state upholds the maximum importance. Previously boundary and borderlands have always been understood in association with national security and the presence of security force but in the present age there are other social factors like identities, values, culture, norms and most importantly gender which come to constitute 'borderlands'. Women are the most vulnerable part of a society, and when it comes to borderland, then the question of women becomes many times more problematic. From gender perspective, women are seen as the 'margin' of the society but if we compare the situation of borderland women with that of the women living in places faraway from border, then we will find that women in borderlands are "margin within a margin". Women in the border are often marginalised not only from the state's security framework but also from academia and most importantly different types of violence. Borderland women are always prone to violence they often becomes the victim of border politics. The main aim of this paper is to analyse the patterns of violence against women in West Bengal-Bangladesh borderland areas. The women from this West Bengal-Bangladesh border areas are often suffers from four major issues-trafficking, women are being used in smuggling, ill opportunities in the field of health and education, domestic violence. While the first two deals with hard-core violence against women, the latter two proclaims softer violence against women.

**Keywords:** Borderland, Gender, marginalised, trafficking, violence, Smuggling.

## **Introduction:**

Borderlands are not just a land or space created in the particular process of boundary demarcation. It is the land where the security of any states up holds the immense importance. Hence, borderlands need to be understood in relation with national security, beginning and the end the state territorial claim so on and so forth. Boundary and borderlands have always been understood in association with national security and the presence of military. But that does not mean that other social factors are not relevant for understanding borderland. In the present age there are some social factors like identities, values, culture, norms and most important gender is gaining more importance in borderland studies. Through border and border related studies are not new, there are plenty number of studies regarding US – Mexico borderland. But still borderland studies in the context of South Asia, is a recent phenomenon. There are some words that have made borderland as the focal area of their study in the last one decade. William Van Schendel in his book *Bengal Borderland* (2004), has rightly pointed out that border lands are not just associated with the state struggle over their territorial claim but also associated with the multiplicity of identities, old and new, that borderlands juggled in their efforts to make sense of their new situation and shape a place almost every day. Ranabir Samaddar in his book ‘*The Migration from Bangladesh from West Bengal*’ also describe about the transborder migrations at Bengal – Bangladesh borderland, and Samaddar goes beyond the security and important border discourses and problematizes the borderland by speaking of flows across the border. Again, there is another book by Paula Banerjee entitled; *Borders, Histories, Existences: Gender and Beyond*. She describes women role in the borderland of India and the collection is meant to address the lacuna.

Now one question raised, what is unique in South Asia borderlands? Well maximum state system of South Asia is a result of the partitions in the eastern and the western part of the erstwhile United India subcontinent from which three states born, that is India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The border dividing these three countries are highly sensitive in nature, because it is carrying bitter past histories. The bitterness of the past, lack of mutual responsibilities, cooperation, existence of religious based identity made these South Asian borders unique in nature. According to Paula Banerjee South Asian border is unique, both spatially metaphorically and it also make the space of borderland more complex. Through India-Pakistan borderland it is most sensitive among all South Asian borderlands, but still India-Bangladesh borderland or particularly Bengal-Bangladesh borderland proclaims some unique in its nature. According to Joya Chatterjee (Chatterjee, 2002), she argues that to understand Bengal-

Bangladesh borderland one needs to look at Hindu communalism and Muslim communalism. Bengal-Bangladesh borderland do carries lots of societal and political factors like religion, identity, culture, bilateral relation, violence, societal flaws etc. Paula Banerjee in her book 'Border, Histories, Existence: Gender and Beyond' described that borderlands are often sites of exclusion/inclusion in the context of South Asia, thus Bengal-Bangladesh borderland is same in nature. Since borderland by the place of endemic violence thus women are the worst victims of this violence, because women are the most vulnerable part of the society and when it comes to borderland then the question of women becomes many times more problematic gender issues involved in Bengal-Bangladesh borderland.

Boarders are central concern to criminologists because of the concentration of political and material resources mobilised in their "defence" for the physical exclusion of people and for their signifying role in the enactment of legal and social processes aimed at identifying people. Border evokes endemic gender issues. The border is not fixed or immutable, but in constant performance, being constructed and reconstructed in a range of increasingly violent ways. Violence on women has been present in our society since times immemorial. The ethics, the values, the moral, the culture of the society has been framed in such a way or we can say structured in such a way so as to promote exploitation of this fragment which is in reality the root of the society, and when it comes to women belongs to borderland areas, it becomes more problematic in nature. We can easily say that these issues are the sings of structural violence present in borderland areas. As discussed above all are aware that there are many unique features in Bengal-Bangladesh border areas like religious identity, Hindu communism, Muslim communism, culture, past bitterness etc. This is why here violence against women are more vulnerable in nature. Structural violence referred to a form of violence wherein some social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basis needs; rather than conveying a physical image, structural violence is an "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs". Violence against woman has taken the form of a global epidemic which has taken its toll on the physical, psychological, sexual and economic life of the female and when we are referring to the 'borderland women' then the situation becomes much worse. 'Borderland women' are subjected to 'structural violence' which results from sexism, rape, trafficking, psychological torture, ill opportunities in the field of education and health, domestic violence and other acts of violence resulting from the social and political structure of a border. The women from border areas more specifically Bengal-Bangladesh border areas are denied of their fundamental rights. This type of structural violence against

woman can be direct or indirect. The direct costs for violence against women include lives lost as well as cost of services provided. Such as expenditures on medical treatment and psychological counselling, legal protection, providing housing and shelters for women and social services. Indirect costs include days of work lost leading to reduced productivity and its impact on overall economy, but for 'Borderland women' one can find easily the signs of direct structural violence.

From gender perspective, women are seen as the 'margin' of the society but if we compare the situation of borderland women with that of the women living in places faraway from border, then we will find that women in borderland are "margin within a margin". Women in the border are often marginalised not only from the states security framework but also from academia and must importantly different types of violence. Borderland women are always prone to violence and they often become the victim of border politics. The situation of living in Bengal-Bangladesh borderland are unique and worst because presence of disunity informal connection and voluminous informal trade, securitized and militarized lines, heavy para-military presence, communal discord, humanitarian crisis, makes it particularly problematic for women.

#### **Patterns violence against women living in Bengal-Bangladesh borderland:**

The main aim of this paper is to analyse the patterns of the violence against women in Bengal-Bangladesh borderland areas. The women from this Bengal-Bangladesh borderland are often suffers from four major issues. These issues are:-

- I. Women are being trafficked as sex workers.
- II. Here women are being used in smuggling.
- III. They often suffers from ill opportunities in the field of health and education.
- IV. Domestic violence.

Between these four issues, the first two deals with hard-core violence against women and the latter two proclaims softer deals only with the hard-core violence against borderland women, there are very few writing that deals with the softer version of violence against 'borderland women'. The softer violence includes psychology torture against women by our patriarchal society. Still the main violence against these women are trafficking.

#### **Trafficking as a dangerous evil against women living in Bengal-Bangladesh borderland:**

Trafficking is a social evil for women living in Bengal-Bangladesh borderland. Bengal-Bangladesh borderlands covers the district of Nadia, Murshidabad, Malda, Cooch-Bihar and Alipurduar. Trafficking in Bengal-Bangladesh border areas are often rampant. The term used to describe the abuse of women in the process of migration was 'trafficking'. Women from Bangladesh are largely trafficked to India. From India they might then be taken to Pakistan or the Middle East. According to data collected from Paula Banerjee's book where she mentioned and research by Sanlaap, in two red light areas of West Bengal it was revealed that most of these women migrated from one place to another. Almost ninety percent of red light areas that they have identified as places that they have war in are situated in this states that border Bangladesh. Most of these are either in North East or in West Bengal. Women living in Bengal-Bangladesh border areas are mostly trafficked as sex workers. These trafficked women are rapidly used as commodity. Most of these women are illiterate and most of them are from poor and minority families. They are deprived of their education or even a social environment. Thus women who are trafficked from Bangladesh to India face tremendous brutality.

There are some NGOs who are working to rescue these trafficked women. Such as 'MASUM'. MASUM is working to protect these trafficked women and trying to resettle them and make them self-independent. But it is often seen that trafficked women are forced to join prostitution to earn their ends and means.

### **Women are being used in smuggling in the area of Bengal-Bangladesh borderland:**

Women in the area of Bengal-Bangladesh borderland are not only trafficked but also used as a smuggling tool. Women are forced to carry Phensedyl from India to Bangladesh. Phensedyl is a cough syrup which is an alcohol based drug. It is banned in India as well as Bangladesh.

Not only phensedyl, women from these border areas are used to smuggle drugs and other things which is very rampant in this area.

### **III Health and Education opportunities:**

The border is a place of endemic poverty, substantial illiteracy among women. According to a survey undertaken in three border villages, namely Shikarpur, Char Meghna, Nasirerapara it was found out that most women in this area are illiterate.

These women have very few options in their health care. They do have proper sanitation problem, low medical facilities are also there.

**Domestic violence:**

Domestic violence is a day to day problem in our society. Women are forced to face violence by their family members, relatives, in laws; but when it comes to borderland areas then the situation becomes more complex. In India as well as in Bangladesh, the structure of the society is patriarchal that's why sometimes women forced to give up their fundamental rights. Domestic violence in the Bengal-Bangladesh border areas is quite frequent in nature

Again there are various NGOs working against domestic violence against women. Still no one can deny the existence of this societal flaw.

**References:**

Schendel,V,Willem. 2005. *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*. London: Anthem south Asian studies.

Samaddar,Ranabir.1999. *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*. New Delhi: Sage Publication.

Banerjee,Paula, Roy Chaudhury,B,Anasua.2011. *Women in Indian Borderland*. New Delhi: Sage Publication.